...THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PALACE OVER THE YEARS ARE LISTED IN CLASSIFIED RECORDS.
INCI-DENTS AND ACCI-DENTS ...
THE NEXT DAY
Chapter 32 The Ritual
JINSHI AND THE OTHERS ARE OUT, SO I CAN TAKE MY TIME WITH MY RESEARCH.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.
I WILL.
I OUGHT TO BE THANKING YOU FOR GIVING ME SOME-THING TO DO.
MY PLEA-SURE.
I'LL LEAVE THESE HERE FOR YOU.
THUD
THANK YOU.

IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THE MINISTRY OF RITES OVERSEES EDUCATION AND DIPLOMACY.
SO THE MINISTER WHO CAME DOWN WITH FOOD POISONING WAS PART OF THE MINISTRY OF RITES.
THIS REPORT IS ABOUT THE INCIDENT FROM THE OTHER DAY.
HMM ...?
EXCUSE ME, WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT POST IS THIS ONE?
OH, THAT'S THE ONE IN CHARGE OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND THE LIKE.
HMM...?
BUT...
...IT'S TOO LATE TO BE ASHAMED OF MY IGNORANCE NOW.
I'D PROBABLY BE SURER OF THIS HAD I TAKEN MORE CARE WITH MY STUDIES FOR THE COURT LADIES' EXAM.
THAT'S RIGHT. LI HAKU DID MENTION THE MAN WAS IN CHARGE OF RITUAL IMPLEMENTS.
RITUALS ...

MAY I HAVE SOME-THING TO WRITE ON?!
S-SURE.
BAM
GASP
AND IF I WERE TO ASSUME THAT THE UPROAR DURING THE FIRE...
...WAS TO ENSURE THE THEFT OF THE RITUAL IMPLE-MENTS...
MUTTER
MUTTER
RITU-ALS.
RITU-ALS.
THEY MUST'VE BEEN TARGETED FROM THE OUTSET.
LORD KOUNEN AND THE COMATOSE MINISTER WERE BOTH OFFICIALS INVOLVED WITH RITUALS.
THE OVERLAP AMONG THEM SHOULD POINT ME TO THEIR PURPOSE.
...THEN THESE SEEMINGLY ISOLATED COINCIDENCES ARE ACTUALLY ANYTHING BUT.

BUT THE IMPLEMENTS THAT WERE SO METICULOUSLY STOLEN...
...ARE RESERVED FOR USE IN MID-SCALE RITUALS OR GRANDER.
MID-SCALE, HMM...
THERE'S NOTHING STRANGE ABOUT THEM.
RITUALS THEMSELVES TAKE PLACE YEAR-ROUND. SOME ARE MAJOR, OTHERS MINOR.

HE TOLD ME I WAS FREE FOR THE DAY, SO WHEN I GET BACK, I'LL—
OH! THAT REMINDS ME!
IT'D PROBABLY BE EASIER TO JUST ASK HIM ABOUT THIS.
JINSHI OFTEN PER-FORMS RITUAL ABLU-TIONS.

...IS THIS AN ILLUSTRA-TION OF THE PLACE WHERE RITUALS ARE CON-DUCTED?
IT IS!
ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE OUTER COURT IS A PLACE CALLED THE TEMPLE OF THE AZURE SKY.
ITS CON-STRUCTION IS QUITE UNUSUAL.
FLAP
IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN RITUALS, I HAVE JUST THE THING FOR YOU!
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

THEY DANCE IN THE SMOKE OF THE INCENSE BURNING IN THE BRAZIER.
THEY'RE SAID TO BECOME PRAYERS AND ASCEND TO HEAVEN.
NEW INSCRIPTIONS ARE ADDED WITH EACH RAISING AND LOWERING OF THE BEAM.
YOU SEEM TO KNOW A LOT ABOUT IT.
THEY TOOK GREAT PAINS TO SUSPEND A GIANT METAL BEAM FROM THE CEILING...
...FROM WHICH BANNERS HANG DOWN ABOVE THE CENTRAL ALTAR.
THERE'S SOME SORT OF WRITING ON THEM, ISN'T THERE?
THEY'RE WORDS OF CEL-EBRATION.
BEFORE I CAME TO THE ARCHIVES HERE...
...I HAD A FAR MORE RESPECT-ABLE JOB AT THE MINISTRY OF RITES, YOU SEE.
OHH, THAT EXPLAINS THE DELUXE ARCHIVE EXPERIENCE I'M BEING TREATED TO.
I WAS WORRIED ABOUT ITS STRENGTH AT FIRST...
...BUT I'M GLAD IT TURNED OUT OKAY.
HUH?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WHEN I WARNED MY SUPERIORS ABOUT IT, I WAS DEMOTED AND ENDED UP HERE.
OOH.
THAT IS INDEED A SCARY THOUGHT.
IT'S A MASSIVE PIECE OF METAL, SO IT'S SCARY TO IMAGINE WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF IT FELL.
...BY A ROPE THAT RUNS THROUGH A PULLEY ON THE CEILING AND IS ANCHORED TO THE FLOOR.
THE CENTRAL BEAM IS RAISED AND LOWERED...
...THE PERSON IN THE MOST DANGER WOULD BE THE ONE STANDING DIRECTLY BELOW IT, PERFORMING THE RITUAL.
...AND THE BEAM FELL FROM THE CEIL-ING...
IF THE FITTINGS AND FAS-TENERS WERE TO BREAK...
IN THE EVENT OF A MID- OR LARGE-SCALE RITUAL, THE VICTIM WOULD BE SOMEONE REASONABLY HIGH UP IN THE PECKING ORDER.

BUT THAT COULD PROVE A COMPELLING MOTIVE FOR THE THEFT OF THE RITUAL IMPLEMENTS.
NO, EVEN SO...
IF SUCH IMPORTANT IMPLEMENTS ARE LOST...
...SURELY THEY'LL JUST BE REMADE?
...THEY'VE BEEN REMADE ALREADY?
BUT WHAT IF...
SLAM
EX-CUSE ME!
WHEN WILL THE NEXT RITUAL AT THIS LOCATION BE HELD?

WHEN? LET'S SEE...
WHY, TODAY, I BELIEVE.
THE TEMPLE OF THE AZURE SKY TO THE WEST OF THE OUTER COURT!
IF I'M RIGHT...
...THIS PLOT MUST'VE BEEN IN THE WORKS FOR A VERY LONG TIME.
DASH!

...ALL LEADING UP TO THIS MOMENT.
ONE BY ONE, SEEMINGLY ARBITRARY TRAPS WERE SPRUNG...
BUT...
IT'S MERE CON-JECTURE ON MY PART.
...IF MY SUSPI-CIONS ARE CORRECT...
NOTHING MORE THAN SPECU-LATION.
...THERE'LL BE A FIRE NEAR THE ANCHORS!

CHATTER
ガヤ
THAT MUST BE IT!
CHATTER
ガヤ
GRR!
YOU THERE !!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING ?!
TCH!
I HAVE TO HURRY, OR ELSE IT'LL BE TOO LATE!
THIS IS AN EMER-GENCY, SIR.
PLEASE LET ME PASS.

HE'S GOT A POINT.
RGH...
AS A MAID, I HAVE NO AUTHORITY HERE.
I CAN'T SAY WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT ANYTHING BAD WILL HAPPEN EITHER.
WHO ARE YOU, LOWLY DRUDGE, TO INTERFERE IN A SACRED RITE?!
YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE. THE RITUAL ISN'T OVER YET!

...IT'S ALWAYS TOO LATE.
BY THE TIME WE REALIZE THAT WHAT IS DONE CANNOT BE UNDONE...
BUT...
CLENCH

MURMUR
...TRY DROPPING A LETTER INTO A SUGGESTION BOX FIRST!
IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY...
THAT'S NOT FOR YOU TO DECIDE!
MURMUR
PLEASE STOP THE RITUAL!
A MAN'S LIFE IS IN DANGER!!

YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET NOT LETTING ME IN...
...ESPECIALLY IF YOU KEEP DENYING THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION NOW THAT I'VE EXPLAINED HOW GRAVE IT REALLY IS.
I'VE FOUND A FATAL FLAW IN THE ALTAR.
IT MAY HAVE BEEN KNOWINGLY DESIGNED THAT WAY.
OHH!
WAIT! I THINK I GET IT NOW.
SNAP
YOU'RE DELAYING ME HERE PRECISELY BECAUSE YOU'RE WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN, AREN'T YOU?
AND THAT CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING.
YOU, SIR, ARE IN LEAGUE WITH THE VILLAIN RESPON-SIBLE FOR THE VANDALISM OF THE ALTAR.

WHUNK

SKRSH
MY VISION'S GONE WHITE.
MY EAR BURNS.
...IT'S NO WONDER THE GUARD FLEW INTO A RAGE.
AFTER I INTENTIONALLY PROVOKED HIM LIKE THAT...

A MAJOR RITUAL WON'T GRIND TO A HALT JUST BECAUSE OF SOME MINOR DISTURBANCE.
I GUESS MAKING TROUBLE WON'T DO THE JOB.
MUSIC IS STILL COMING FROM THE ALTAR.
...A NOSE... BLEED ...?
DRIP
DRIP
MURMUR
I CAN'T GO FAINTING HERE.
I TRUST YOU'VE GOTTEN ALL THAT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM NOW?
WOBBLE
PLEASE LET ME PASS.
SNORT

...I'LL NEVER GET MY HANDS ON THAT BEZOAR!
SQUEEZE
ふら WOBBLE
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE OUT HERE.
ふら WOBBLE
I'VE GOT TO GET HIM TO LET ME IN.
ふら WOBBLE
IF I FAIL AND SOMETHING HAPPENS...
WHAP
IT WILL BE YOUR HEADS THAT ROLL SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN TO HIM!
SOMEONE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE IS IN THERE, RIGHT?!

LOOK, I WON'T EVEN ASK YOU TO STOP THE RITUAL!
PLEASE JUST LET ME PASS! PRETEND YOU NEVER SAW ME!
SAY A MOUSE ACCIDENTALLY SLIPPED IN!
THAT WAY ...
...THE ONLY HEAD TO ROLL WILL BE MINE.
OF COURSE...
...I HAVE EVERY INTENTION OF BEGGING JINSHI...
...FOR DEATH BY POISON RATHER THAN BEHEADING, IF POSSIBLE.
WHY SHOULD I HEED THE BABBLING OF A NOSY LITTLE GIRL LIKE YOU?
IN THAT CASE ...

...HOW ABOUT HEEDING MY WORDS INSTEAD?
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
I MUST SAY...
SIR ...!

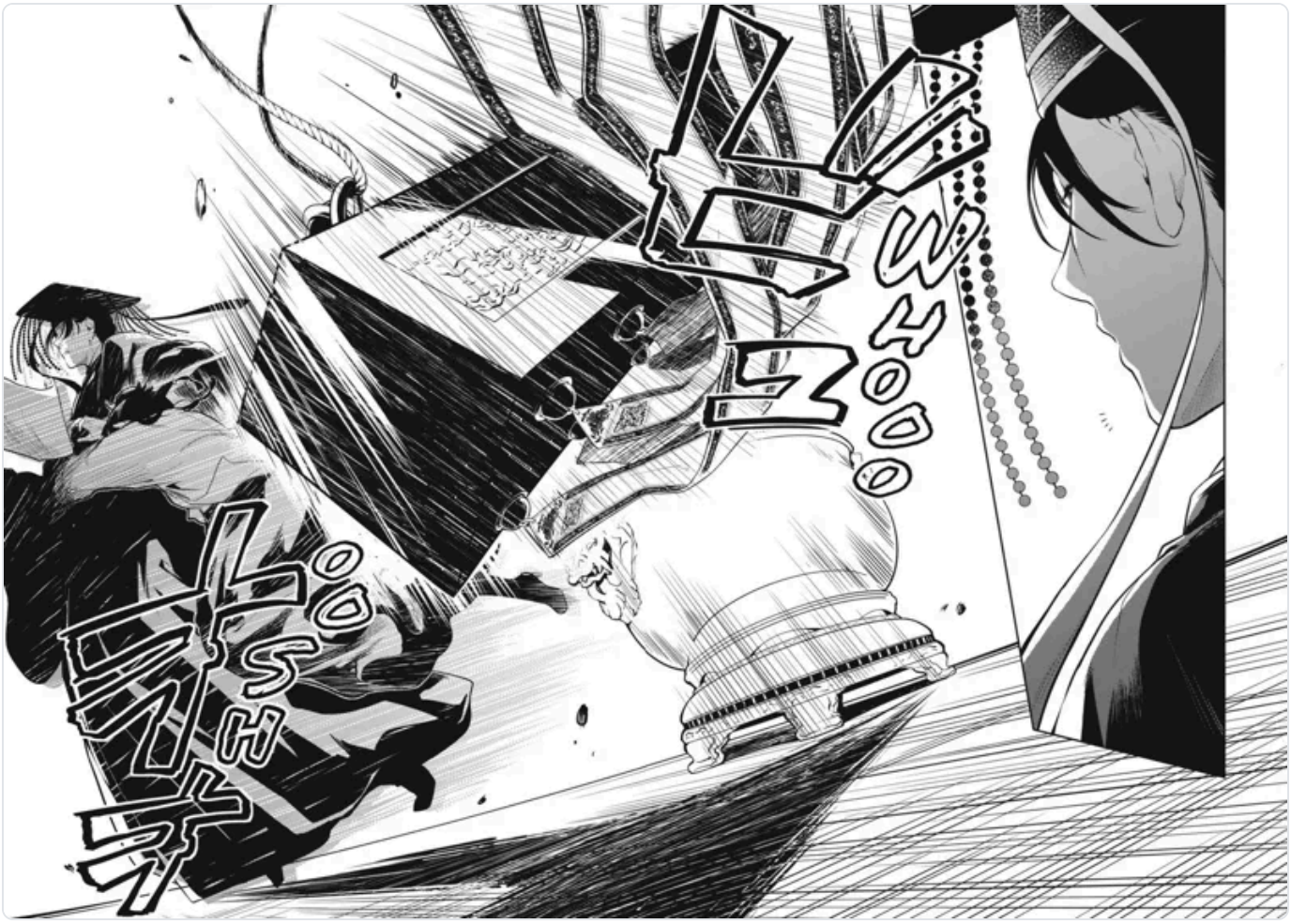
I WANT TO KNOW WHO DID IT.
HITTING A YOUNG WOMAN? THERE'S NO PLACE FOR THAT HERE.
CAN'T YOU SEE YOU'VE GONE AND HURT HER?

I'LL TAKE RESPON-SIBILITY, COME WHAT MAY.
ANYWAY, WHY DON'T YOU DO AS SHE ASKS?

SUCH GOOD TIMING. ALMOST AS IF HE PLANNED IT.
GRIT
ギリ
NO.
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO DWELL ON THAT NOW.
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO IS LENDING HIS VOICE TO MY CAUSE.
DASH
HEW!

MURMUR
I'M SURE I'M UNFIT TO BE HERE, IN THIS PLACE WHERE PRAYERS ARE MADE TO HEAVEN.
I MUST LOOK AWFUL.
MAYBE ONCE THIS IS ALL OVER...
...I'LL ASK GAO SHUN IF I CAN BORROW HIS BATH FOR A LONG, HOT SOAK.
TAK
BUT BEFORE THAT...

DASH
CRACK
...I HAVE TO MAKE SURE I DON'T LOSE MY HEAD.
CREAK


WHOOO
SHOOO

AASH
CRAA
AAA

THROB
HFF!
HFF!
NGH!
IT BURNS.
WHEW...
...HE'S SAFE.
OH BOY.
THE METAL BEAM MUST HAVE GOUGED MY LEG WHEN IT FELL.
SLOWLY
168

HEY.
RUSTLE
THAT'LL REQUIRE STITCHES.
ERM, HOW DID WE GET INTO THIS MESS?
WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
SIR JINSHI!

MAY I...
...HAVE MY BEZOAR NOW?

THAT'S THE LAST THING THAT SHOULD BE ON YOUR MIND AMID ALL THIS.

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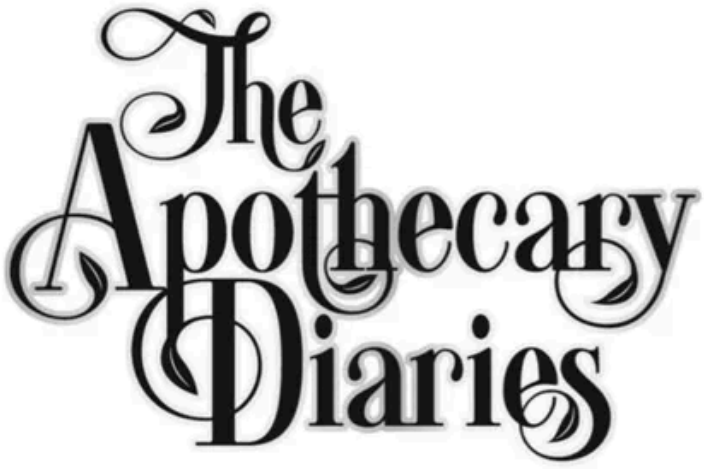
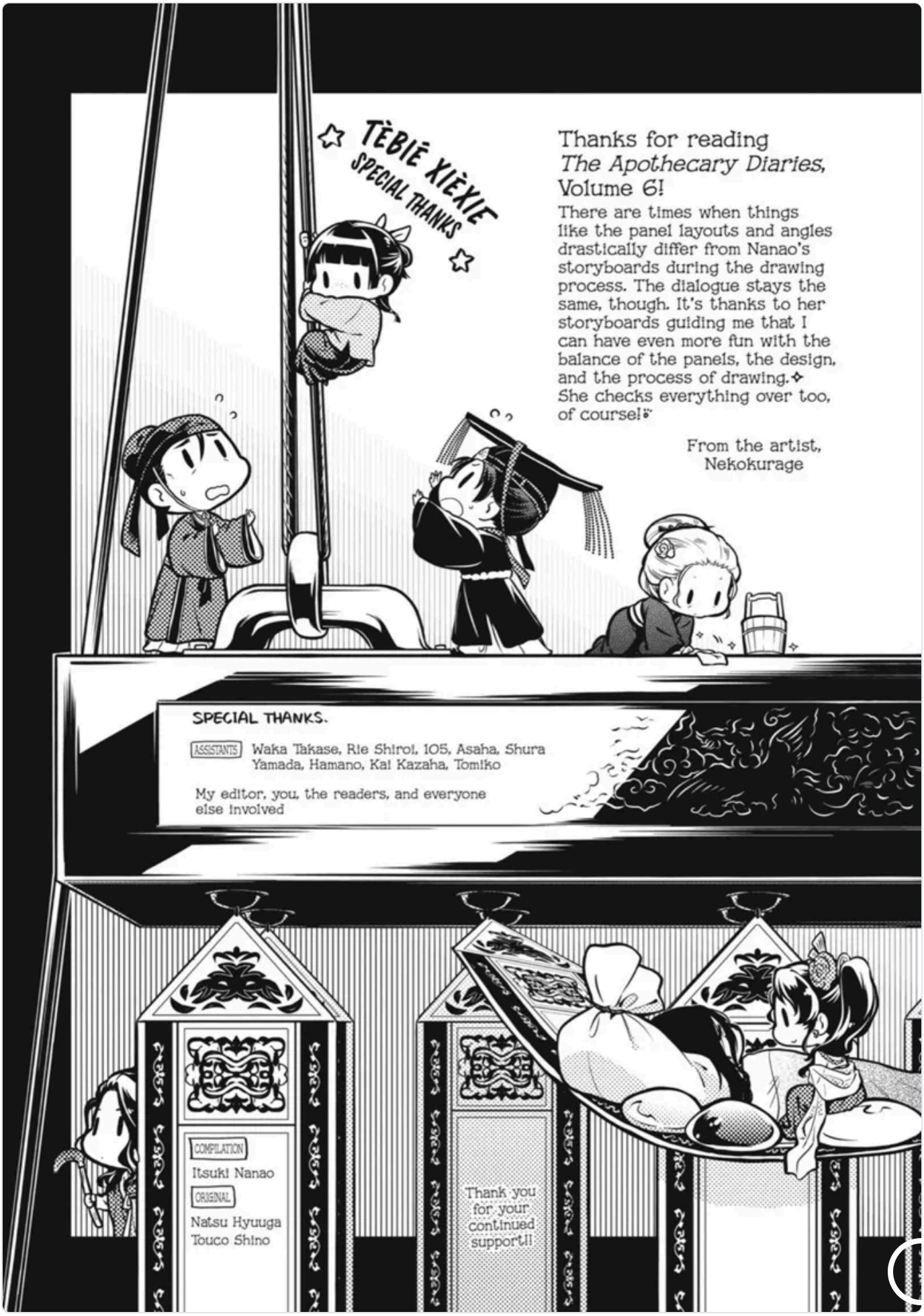
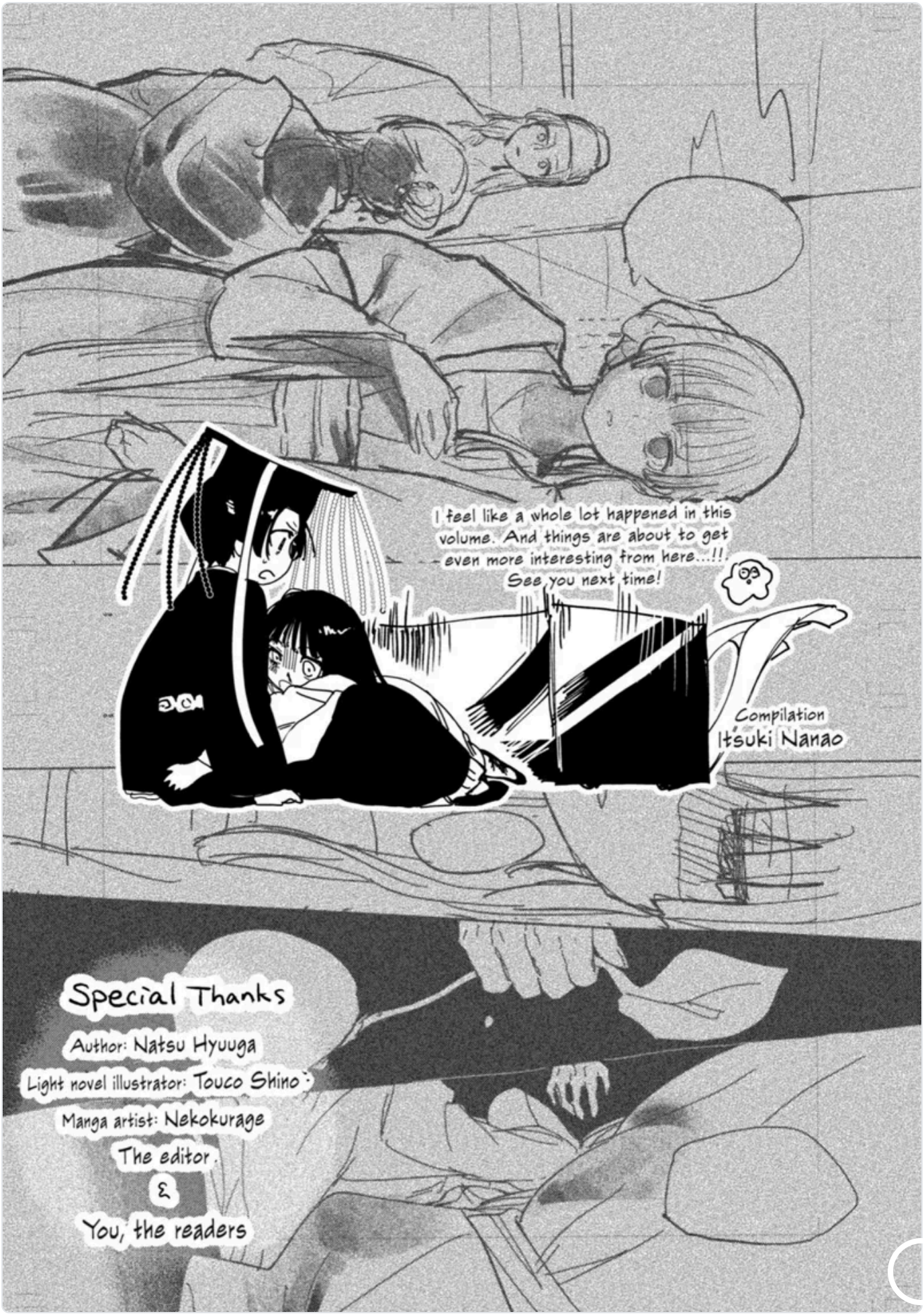
WHAT'S BECOME OF YOUR FACE?
WHY IS HE LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?
H-HEY!
UH-OH.
I REALLY NEED TO STITCH UP MY LEG AS SOON AS—
OH!
FOR-GIVE ME.
THE CRACK TO THE HEAD I TOOK IS...
THUD
SWAY

HEY!
STAY WITH ME!
OPEN YOUR EYES!
...!
OH, JINSHI ...
DO BE QUIET, WON'T YOU ...?
THE APOTHECARY DIARIES 5 • End


The
Apothecary
Diaries


TÈBIÉ XIÈXIE
SPECIAL THANKS
Thanks for reading
The Apothecary Diaries,
Volume 6!
There are times when things like the panel layouts and angles drastically differ from Nanao's storyboards during the drawing process. The dialogue stays the same, though. It's thanks to her storyboards guiding me that I can have even more fun with the balance of the panels, the design, and the process of drawing.✧ She checks everything over too, of course!
From the artist,
Nekokurage
SPECIAL THANKS.
ASSISTANTS Waka Takase, Rie Shirai, 105, Asaha, Shura Yamada, Hamano, Kai Kazaha, Tomiko
My editor, you, the readers, and everyone else involved
COMPILATION
Itsuki Nanao
ORIGINAL
Natsu Hyuuga
Touco Shino
Thank you for your continued support!!


I feel like a whole lot happened in this volume. And things are about to get even more interesting from here...!!
See you next time!
Compilation
Itsuki Nanao
Special Thanks
Author: Natsu Hyuuga
Light novel illustrator: Touco Shino
Manga artist: Nekokurage
The editor
&
You, the readers

Story by Itsuki Nanao Art by Nekokurage

Story by Itsuki Nanao Art by Nekokurage